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# The Ganges Water Treaty at 30 — Farakka, the Padma Barrage and the 2026 Renewal

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# The Ganges Water Treaty at 30 — Farakka, the Padma Barrage and the 2026 Renewal

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## WHY IN NEWS

*Bangladesh has approved Phase 1 of the Tk 34,497 crore Padma Barrage, located around 180 km downstream of Farakka, even as the 1996 Ganges Water Sharing Treaty between India and Bangladesh heads toward its expiry in December 2026, with renewal talks underway.*

The convergence (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/convergence/>) of a new downstream barrage and an expiring treaty has put one of South Asia's longest-running water disputes back at the centre of India-Bangladesh relations.

## THE GANGA AS A SHARED RIVER

The Ganga rises in the Indian Himalaya and flows across the plains before entering Bangladesh, where it is called the Padma. Because the river is shared, the dry-season flow has been a source of friction since India commissioned the Farakka Barrage in 1975.

### Why Farakka was built

The Farakka Barrage, in West Bengal, was constructed to divert a share of the Ganga's water into the Bhagirathi-Hooghly system. The aim was to flush silt and maintain navigability at the Kolkata port, which had been silting up. The diversion, however, reduced flow into what was then East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, especially in the lean season, creating a long-standing grievance over reduced dry-season water.

## THE 1996 TREATY

After years of ad hoc arrangements, India and Bangladesh signed the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty on December 12, 1996 for a term of thirty years. The Treaty set out a formula for sharing the flow measured at Farakka during the dry season, which it defined as January 1 to May 31.

## The sharing formula

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FLOW AT FARAKKA (CUSECS)	SHARING ARRANGEMENT
70,000 or less	50:50 between India and Bangladesh
70,000 to 75,000	Bangladesh guaranteed 35,000 cusecs
75,000 or more	India draws 40,000 cusecs, balance to Bangladesh

The most sensitive ten-day periods between March 11 and May 10 are managed under an alternating arrangement so that each side receives an agreed share in turn.

## The missing guarantee clause

A persistent Indian concern is that the Treaty contains no guarantee clause assuring a minimum flow to India in years of exceptionally low water. If the natural flow collapses, India's share is squeezed without a protective floor. This gap is a focus of the renewal discussions.

## THE PADMA BARRAGE FACTOR

Bangladesh's approval of Phase 1 of the Padma Barrage, around 180 km downstream of Farakka, signals an intent to capture and regulate flow within its own territory rather than rely solely on releases governed by the Treaty. From Dhaka's view, this addresses dry-season scarcity and sedimentation on its stretch of the river. From India's view, a large downstream structure adds a new variable to a system that is already contested, and it raises questions about coordinated operation of two barrages on one river.

## ANALYSIS

The renewal of the 1996 Treaty is more than a technical water-sharing exercise. It is a barometer of trust between two neighbours whose ties run through shared rivers, with 54 transboundary (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/transboundary/>) rivers in all. West Bengal is a directly affected party, and its concerns over reduced flow for navigation and irrigation give the issue a federal dimension. The simultaneous emergence of the Padma Barrage means any renewed treaty must reckon with both upstream diversion at Farakka and downstream regulation in Bangladesh.

STAKEHOLDER	CORE INTEREST
India (Centre)	Stable diversion for Hooghly, a guarantee clause for lean years
West Bengal	Adequate flow for navigation and irrigation
Bangladesh	Assured dry-season share, downstream regulation via Padma Barrage

## WAY FORWARD

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A renewed framework should ideally move from a single-point Farakka formula toward basin-level, data-shared management, with joint hydrological monitoring and a transparent mechanism for low-flow years. Including a minimum-flow guarantee would address India's central concern. Genuine consultation with West Bengal would strengthen the federal legitimacy of any new arrangement. Coordinated operation of the Farakka and Padma barrages could turn a point of friction into a model of cooperative transboundary management.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

For GS Paper 2, this is a prime case of India's neighbourhood relations, treaty obligations and the role of states in foreign policy that touches their territory. For GS Paper 1, it connects to the geography of the Ganga-Brahmaputra system, river dynamics and siltation. Examiners may ask about the sharing formula, the absence of a guarantee clause, and the strategic significance of the renewal.

## FACTS CORNER

### ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

Treaty signed: December 12, 1996; 30-year term; expires December 2026.

Dry season: Defined as January 1 to May 31.

Formula: 50:50 split when flow at Farakka is 70,000 cusecs or less; Bangladesh guaranteed 35,000 cusecs at 70,000 to 75,000 cusecs.

Farakka Barrage: Commissioned 1975 in West Bengal; diverts to the Hooghly for Kolkata port.

Padma Barrage: Tk 34,497 crore, Phase 1 approved, around 180 km downstream of Farakka.

Key gap: No guarantee clause for minimum flow to India in lean years.

**Sources:** *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com>), *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com>)

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